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Towards mutuality in international museum cooperation. Reflections on a Swiss-Ugandan cooperative museum project

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Abstract: “Towards Mutuality in International Museum Cooperation: Reflections on a Swiss-Ugandan Cooperative Museum Project,” by Thomas Laely, Marc Meyer, Amon Mugume, and Raphael Schwere, presents an auto-ethnographic, self-reflexive and critical analysis of mutuality in international museum corporation. The authors focus on “Drink Deeply/Points of View,” a research and exhibition project that was organized in a collaboration between the Ethnographic Museum at the University of Zurich and the Uganda Museum in Kampala. Through this specific case study, the authors approach the notion of “mutuality” both as an ideal and as a *modus operandi*. This dual approach to mutuality provides concrete insights in the potential and fragility of working with this ideal in practice, such as how to deal with unconscious bias of historically rooted and culturally engrained prejudices and hierarchies, and addresses the broader question of whether and how museum cooperation can lead to the reinvention of museums as institutions of mutuality.

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Towards a Museum of Mutuality

Towards Mutuality in International Museum Cooperation

Reflections on a Swiss- Ugandan Cooperative Museum Project

Thomas Laely, Marc
Meyer, Amon Mugume
and Raphael Schwere

Thinking about a “museum of mutuality” affords the question of who the actors are and, accordingly, between whom mutuality is a characteristic of their relationship, ideally or practically. The call for papers for this special issue invited contributors to examine how museums and audiences are intertwined in mutuality. Over the last few decades, expectations directed to this relationship have tended to point towards its “democratization”¹ and inclusiveness, towards opening the institution as a forum for sociocultural exchange and debate, towards plurivocality concerning representation, and towards greater accessibility to and renegotiation of the ownership of its collections.² It is anticipated, and according to the current trends in museology rightly so, that museums are transforming from being inward-looking institutions that communicate unilaterally from an authoritarian and custodian position, to becoming outward-looking organizations that insert themselves permeably into society.

Mutuality is commonly understood as a moral value or a principle of seeking reciprocally referential “mutually positive relations.”³ The present article focuses on the analysis of mutuality in the relations between *museums* themselves, not between museums and other external stakeholders, such as

representatives of communities of the provenance of collections or museum audiences. Specifically, we examine if and how this quality manifests itself in a trilateral cooperative research and curatorial arrangement between one Swiss and two Ugandan museums. Thereby we depart from the assumption that, firstly, the abovementioned transformation of museums has also formed the manner of interaction of African with European museums and, secondly, we are convinced that it is high time for an empiric analysis of transnational museum cooperation practices.

Hence, the goal of this text is to investigate mutuality in international museum cooperation by interrogating it as a principle or ideal and as a characteristic of, or attitude towards, a lived relationship in practice. By auto-ethnographically, self-reflectively, and critically analyzing the intentions, modalities, and conditions of our own cooperation experiences as empirical data, we ask why and how mutuality was defined, pre-practically, as a principle of cooperation, and how this abstract idea influences and manifests itself in the reality of cooperative practice.

Analytically, we distinguish mutuality as a claim, requirement, or pretension (according to current debates in museology or ethical codes of cooperation⁴) from mutuality as a *modus operandi*.⁵ The latter, mutuality in practice—and this is our main concern here—is a fragile product of cooperative practice or a process which aims to attain the values that are usually tucked inside the notion. Mutuality is negotiated and perceived differently; it is subjected to external and internal factors shaping the relationship, and it benefits parties differently.

In recent years an abundant body of literature has been published on relations and collaborations between museums and communities.⁶ The latter range from local neighborhood communities to communities of the provenance of museums' objects and collections. There are also numerous publications about the newly invoked relations with external partners, potential new publics and audiences, marginalized groups, or diaspora organizations.⁷ However, transnational cooperation between museums (especially between museums in Africa and Europe) is a topic which has not been worked on sufficiently up to now.⁸ The published academic contributions to the field highlight the importance of museum cooperation in order to tackle current challenges, but few go beyond theory or normative appeals.⁹ What is needed, in our view, is an echo from museum practitioners (i.e., voices that report reflectively from actual cases of cooperation projects). There are numerous questions which should be tackled in such empirical analyses. What are the motivations and agendas of museums for engaging in cooperation projects? What happens when different worlds of practice collide? How do cooperating partners deal with different structural environments and working conditions? How do cooperation projects deal with colonial legacies and postcolonial power relations that connect the partners? How are cooperation projects funded? Who benefits, and how?

How are further actors, such as communities of provenance, involved? What role do decolonialization efforts and movements, as well as demands for repatriation and restitution, play? In the following, we will first briefly outline recent developments in the field of transnational cooperation and partnership between museums. Secondly, we provide an insight into our international research and exhibition project, "Drink Deeply/Points of View." Thirdly, mutuality, as an ideal and a *modus operandi*, will be discussed by reflecting on six facets of our cooperation experience. Finally, we evaluate issues of position and authorship.

Debates and Trends in Museum Cooperation

Today museums can no longer build, tend, and exhibit their collections in an introversive, self-referential way. They have been forced to open up in many regards. After calls for decolonization were, in a first phase, addressed primarily to universities and other institutions of education and knowledge, memory, and heritage, they are now being ever more targeted towards the museum world. Ethnographic museums, in particular, are finding themselves in a period of change, even turmoil, in this time of increasing calls to decolonize their collections and the minds of their staff. Thus, they are now in the process of opening up to new audiences and stakeholders, and devising new ways of representing different cultures.¹⁰ Furthermore, they are seeking to account for their own history, the provenance of the artifacts in their collections, as well as the museum practices, which themselves bear traces of the colonial past. In this process, cooperation between ethnographic museums in the Global North and museums in countries of the South has become increasingly important.

However, although there have been numerous international collaborations between African and European museums in recent decades, it is assumed that only a few of them could live up to the claims of postcolonial critique, which have found their way into museology in the late twentieth century.¹¹ Either those collaborations are mainly unidirectional, displaying European exhibitions in African museums, or they are intended to coach African institutions in relevant fields, such as conservation, restoration, or curating, thereby following a development approach.¹² Others are undertaken on a mere consulting level of knowledge exchange, with Afropolitan museologists outside the continent. These kinds of relations are shaped by a technical assistance or development cooperation approach, on a bilateral or multilateral basis. This kind of training program was provided by the International Council of Museums (ICOM), the Swedish-African Museum Programme (SAMP), the Flemish organization Education for Development (VVOB), the Getty Fund, and the Smithsonian and other American foundations, and is also offered by larger museums such as the British Museum,¹³ to mention just a few.¹⁴ To our knowledge, hardly any of these collaborations focus on the joint practical implementation of projects, based on the different local expectations, goals,

and needs of all involved parties. Currently, however, numerous networks of people from a variety of backgrounds working in, with, or about museums, such as cultural activists, museum practitioners, and researchers, are developing and trying to conceptualize new forms of museum cooperation.¹⁵ It seems, as Larissa Förster has observed, that this “productive institutional criticism” and “epistemic decolonization” have started to bear fruit.¹⁶

What is important for this article is the point that museum cooperation projects today are shaped by the current debates in museology and professional trends, as well as by the history of museum cooperation between Africa and Europe dating back to colonial times—and the power relations between the countries of the two continents in the past and present.¹⁷

The “Points of View/Drink Deeply” Project

The example described here, a trilateral partnership between the Ethnographic Museum at the University of Zurich, the Uganda Museum in Kampala, and the Igongo Cultural Centre in Mbarara, southwestern Uganda,¹⁸ arose and evolved quite organically out of daily museum work. In 2013 a researcher at the museum in Zurich approached a curator at the Uganda Museum in Kampala to ask for his expertise in cultural, social, economic, and political aspects of milk in Uganda, as well as to seek support in cleaning Ugandan milk calabashes before transportation to Switzerland. The first encounter with the Igongo Cultural Centre took place in the form of a visit and discussion on East African milk cultures. Starting from this courtesy and knowledge exchange, the cooperation project began slowly, and only developed into a larger project years later, after its formal initiation through several meetings, a laboratory, workshops, and then (eventually successful) fundraising efforts, once a cooperation team was formed and decided to jointly curate two exhibitions in Uganda, followed by one in Switzerland and a follow-up mobile exhibition, again in Uganda. At the outset, however, was the realization of the individual Ugandan and Swiss project members that they could profit from each other’s knowledge and expertise, candid curiosity, and mutual interest in one another’s museum work.

At the first formal meeting in 2015 (the “laboratory”), it became apparent that the motives and expectations of the different partners did not all coincide. While the two Ugandan partners hoped to find access to practical museum know-how (specifically restoration), the Swiss members were looking for a theoretical museological exchange. But what connected all three partners from the beginning was their ethnographic interest in the topics of milk and keeping cattle in both Uganda and Switzerland, as well as engaging in cooperative research and curating. In addition, all three museums expected that this partnership would position them

more visibly on the international museum landscape, due to higher interconnection and international publicity.

From the outset it was important to all three partners involved that the project should develop into a long-term and institutional partnership. Therefore, as a first step, a memorandum of understanding was drawn up. Immediately after signing this memorandum, work on the jointly curated exhibitions began—before any funding for their implementation had been secured. The international team gathered for a workshop to brainstorm and draft an exhibition concept, and thereby entered the field of research for the first time. A few months later, research from the international team on the milk culture topic resumed in Switzerland, and the Ugandan curators shipped the first Swiss artifacts to their respective museums. In December 2016 the project team started to work actively on their museological ambition, a critical reflection of African-European museum cooperation, and for this purpose held an international conference in Zurich to discuss the topic of “Museum Cooperation between Africa and Europe: Opportunities, Challenges and Modalities.”¹⁹ The goal of the conference, for which most speakers came from the African continent, was to float the question of why and how African and European museums cooperate, and to extend the reflection on museum cooperation from the project team to a wider group of experts, sharing experiences, ideas, and uncertainties. Shortly afterwards we received the happy news that an application for substantial funding had been granted—these public means, allocated under the heading of “international development” had to be spent primarily on activities in Uganda. With this necessary financial support, the pace of cooperative activities gained in speed and outcomes. After another round of research in Uganda in April 2017 and joint curatorial work starting that July, two exhibitions on Swiss and Ugandan milk cultures were launched in September 2017, in Kampala (*Drink Deeply!*, until May 2018) and Mbarara (*The Power of Milk*, a permanent exhibition).²⁰ Next followed work on the exhibition in Zurich. We cooperated, as before, digitally (e.g., working on texts) and later physically in a workshop in January 2018, before the small exhibition “Points of View: Visions of a Museum Partnership” was opened in April of the same year.²¹

Against the background of current museological discourses on decolonization and representation of culture and heritage,²² the project team aimed to analyze their cooperative practice auto-ethnographically and self-reflectively.²³ This was realized by documenting their cooperative practices in text, photography, and video. For example, the project team was filmed by a visual anthropologist during all the project activities taking place between 2015 and 2017.²⁴ Furthermore, the project team continuously discussed questions on various dimensions of the cooperation process, such as hierarchies, hidden agendas, and power relations. The film material and the insights from these discussions were used as data and as illustrative material processed for and exhibited in the



Fig. 1. Poster of the exhibition *Drink Deeply!*, Uganda Museum, September 2017 – May 2018. © Uganda Museum.

exhibition. The exhibition and accompanying guided exhibition tours, talks, and discussion rounds aimed to share the curatorial team's cooperation experiences and reflections with experts in the field and the general public, to stimulate debate about the topic further. Also, the texts of this exhibition, along with the film material and a variety of documents (e.g., reports and agreements) provide the empirical basis for this article.

Concomitant to the exhibition in Zurich, the edited volume *Museum Cooperation between Africa and Europe: A New Field for Museum Studies* was published. Among a majority of African contributors, it includes a chapter by Nelson Abiti, one of the cooperation partners from the Uganda Museum.²⁵ Currently, in the first half of 2019, the whole team has been working on a mobile exhibition in Uganda, launched at the end of February 2019, and on brainstorming subsequent activities of mutual interest to all partners.

Mutuality in Cooperation Practice

In order to analyze this cooperation project with a focus on mutuality, it is necessary to develop a working definition of the concept. When understanding mutuality as a moral value or principle of seeking reciprocally referential "mutually positive relations" between museums (see introduction), this means in a simple sense input from all sides, and output for all sides involved, making reciprocally referential relations mutually positive, because all partners profit from an output which they could not attain with only their own input.²⁶ In a broader sense, mutuality also entails aspects which involve a mutual interest among the partners, and an interest in working together, based on shared interests and common goals.

As we suggested in the introduction, it appears analytically instrumental to look at two conceptual layers of mutuality. Firstly, mutuality can be seen as an ideal, a set of normative values. Secondly, it can be looked at as an attribute of a relationship manifested in concrete practices. Following this distinction, we will first analyze how far mutuality, understood as an ideal, is reflected in the project.

Mutuality as a Guiding Principle

The project's guiding cooperation principle is the ideal of cooperating on "an equal level," an approach to cooperation which seeks to implement democratic decision-making processes, mutual knowledge exchange, and egalitarian power relations.²⁷ Following this ideal, the project was designed in an open way by starting off with a laboratory in which the aims of all the different stakeholders were assessed. Then, the content and the planning of the project's activities were jointly defined and worked out.



Fig. 2. Photo of a team meeting in Zurich (2015) displayed in the office of the natural history curator at the Uganda Museum. Photo: Thomas Laely. © Ethnographic Museum at the University of Zurich.

This open project design reflects the ideal of mutuality, enabling the project to develop in line with both individual and shared interests. This is reflected in the specific objectives which were one of the main outputs of this laboratory. It became clear that all partners shared an interest in engaging in joint research and curating²⁸ to gain “mutual insights on the museum work in the two countries,”²⁹ and especially in the three museums involved, to find “new ways of cross-cultural collaboration with a focus on an ‘equal say’ of all contributors,”³⁰ and to “learn about different perspectives of the participants on museum work.”³¹ In addition to assessing the partners’ interests and planning the project, a memorandum of understanding was drafted and signed later on. According to the signed document, the explicit common goal of partnering up is “to engage in cooperative... exhibiting as well as educational and research activities, for the mutual benefit of the three institutions.” Thus, mutuality at this point in time was understood in terms of benefits, but also as a working relationship in which the parties could jointly conceptualize projects that build on their two-way relationality.

Although the mutuality concept was not explicitly and literally used in this early stage of cooperation, the open exchange between the participants with heterogeneous academic and professional backgrounds (including knowledge of current museological debates and postcolonial theory, as well as practical cooperation experience) stimulated the development of an implicit consensus to work together based on an ideal which can arguably be called mutuality.

Mutuality as a Modus Operandi

While the previous section applied a notion of mutuality as an ideal to our analysis of the project, the following section uses an understanding of mutuality as a modus operandi in order to analyze some main aspects and challenges of the cooperation project.

Mutuality under unequal conditions

The first step is to discuss the question of what challenges for mutuality arise from unequal structural conditions. By unequal structural conditions we mean the differing external factors and institutional constraints in which each of the partners is entangled.

Unsurprisingly, unequal conditions between the partner institutions became apparent in the domain of finances. To give an example, at the beginning of the project the partnering institutions agreed that they should all contribute to funding the project, which would prevent the emergence of an unequal power relationship through one-sided financing. Eventually, however, the biggest part of the third-party funds needed were raised almost exclusively in Switzerland. Owing to the funder’s formal requirements, the Swiss partners were given the responsibility to ensure

compliance with the conditions attached to it. Thereby, they unwillingly slipped into the role of financial controllers. This poses a challenge to the idea of mutuality, because control is being exerted from one side only, while the idea of mutuality, in our view, suggests that all partners should be controlling each other. In the project we then applied measures to ensure that the unequal access to financial resources would not result in unequal power relationships. One of these measures was negotiating contractual agreements between the partners which regulate access to financial means.

While there is a clear negative effect from the unequal structural conditions, there is also a potential to use these circumstances in order to promote mutuality in a project, if it is understood as a mutually beneficial relationship in an economic sense. In our case, the Ugandan partners profited from the easier access to financial resources via the Swiss partners, while the Swiss partners were able to apply for certain funds only because they included cooperation with the Ugandan partners.

Negotiating mutuality

An important part of cooperation is the negotiation process, which can be a factor for working together in a relationship of mutuality if all partners endeavor to encounter each other on an equal level. This ensures that each side has the possibility to integrate and promote its interests in the process. But, even if such an approach to negotiation is applied strictly, there is always the threat of an (in many cases) unconscious bias of historically rooted and culturally engrained prejudices and hierarchies (epistemological and in terms of power relations), especially when actors from former colonizing countries and former colonies operate together. This can lead to mistrust between the partners. In this project, for instance, there were concerns whether money from third-party funding would be transferred from Switzerland to Uganda in time and whether the money would be spent in accordance with the signed agreement.³²

In order to work together in a relationship of mutuality, it is imperative to continually critically reflect on and try to detect such influences. From the experiences of the project it can be said that “cultivating the relationship through regular exchange makes it possible to confront uncertainties and differences in a constructive way.”³³

However, regular exchange is restricted by limited resources. These circumstances curtailed participation of members of the three institutions in September 2016 and April 2018, when research was carried out in Switzerland and Uganda, respectively. Both times, only one member would travel and represent their institution. Thus, one individual per institution made decisions about objects to be collected and questions to be asked in the field. This would later present challenges to the ideal of mutuality in decision-making processes within the full team of the respective

museum, because the said researcher was in a more powerful position through their participation in the research.

Mutuality across distance

As shown above, developing trust and close, empathetic personal relationships helps to counter challenges to mutuality in cooperation projects. In the case of intercontinental projects, practical means of communication and information sharing have to be found, because personal meetings cannot be held very often due to the geographical distance. Apart from its positive effect on relationships of trust, there is another factor which makes communication and sharing of information a central concern for mutuality. Equal access to and transparency of information for all partners is important, because this enables all sides to engage in the project equally. Therefore, it is necessary to take a closer look at how mutuality can be achieved across a vast geographical distance and what the challenges are.

In the project we tried to implement equal information access through using a cloud storage service. However, it became clear that this only worked in theory. Usage of the cloud storage was hindered by infrastructural circumstances (slower, unstable, and costlier internet in Uganda), as well as access to suitable hardware (too little hard disk space). Also, a growing amount of data meant that there was an additional cost to be paid for the cloud storage, which prevented some project members from accessing the data. This example shows that different infrastructural conditions and access to resources have an impact on relations of mutuality with regard to communication and data access. In order to ensure mutuality in this domain, therefore, a strategy is needed. In the case of our project, this was to use a set of communication tools including email, a chat application for mobile phones, and cloud data storage, as well as phone calls.

Apart from the technical means, there is a cultural aspect of communication and information sharing with regard to mutuality: cultural differences in the ways people communicate and how communication media are used to develop and maintain social relations. Understanding such differences, as well as developing a shared communication culture within the project team, is crucial to prevent misunderstandings and to ensure equal information access as well as transparent communication, making it a vital basis for mutuality.

Mutuality through knowledge exchange

Another central aspect of mutuality in our cooperation project is the exchange of knowledge. As mentioned earlier, all the partners were motivated to exchange knowledge and generate new insights through cooperation. With this mutual interest in learning from each other, it was important from the beginning to avoid establishing one-sided knowledge transfer from Europe to Africa, as is the case, for instance, in



Fig. 3. *Can you hear me?* Audio recordings of team Skype calls in the exhibition Points of View, Ethnographic Museum at the University of Zurich, April 2018 – January 2019. Photo: Kathrin Leuenberger. © Ethnographic Museum at the University of Zurich.

so-called capacity building programs and other forms of cooperation which follow a “development approach” agenda. In contrast, our project’s acknowledgement and interest in each other’s expertise, thematically and in museum work, enabled mutual learning. This was, for example, the case in the research activities that were collectively planned and undertaken. The European museum staff profited from access to new networks and contacts, also tapping into new and deeper knowledge of their collections. The consistent pooling and negotiation of different perspectives on museological practices, as well as on the contents of the exhibitions, proved to be mutually profitable.³⁴ Such an approach to knowledge exchange—academic anthropological, as well as practical museographic knowledge—makes it necessary to reflect on and challenge the historically rooted Western hegemony of knowledge.³⁵ When trying to implement the principle of mutuality in cooperation practice, such critical reflection has to be practiced continually.

A challenge regarding knowledge exchange in cooperation was experienced as follows: the project members have different disciplinary backgrounds and therefore use different professional languages. One project member has a university degree in biology, while most of the other members are anthropologists and one curator graduated in tourism. Moreover, they have diverse expertise in many topics. This poses challenges to establishing and maintaining relationships of mutuality in the domain of knowledge exchange. The reason for this is that different expertise and professional language can lead to misunderstandings, and knowledge authority resulting from expertise contradicts mutual exchange.

Mutuality and points of view

Finally, there is one more opportunity for mutuality in cooperation projects which we would like to highlight here: the mutual understanding and acknowledgement of heterogeneous points of view, as opinion and perspective, with the aim of achieving multiperspectivity and plurivocality. This approach is based on and resonates with current theoretical insights.³⁶ Bringing together, acknowledging, and integrating different points of view is central to our cooperation approach, and we argue here that it is (at least in our case) a precondition for achieving mutuality.

This cooperation is inspired by a “reverse-anthropological” approach. Moreover, it seeks to bring together different interpretations and perspectives, and to reciprocally invert the object of research. Both the Ugandan and the Swiss parts of the team always insisted on the participation and inputs of the other part in conceptualizing and co-curating the exhibitions. Research on our respective milk cultures was done by mixed teams in Uganda and in Switzerland, and the research findings and collected objects were featured in the exhibitions in all the museums involved. As the curator of the Igongo Cultural Centre pointed out, “This is a precedent in the museum cooperation between African



Fig. 4. Milk exhibitions concept workshop in Zurich, January 2018. Photo: Marc Meyer. © Ethnographic Museum at the University of Zurich.



Fig. 5. Brainstorming with the exhibition designer at the Ethnographic Museum in Zurich, January 2018. Photo: Thomas Laely. © Ethnographic Museum at the University of Zurich.



Fig. 6. Brainstorming with the exhibition designer at the Uganda Museum, July 2017. Photo: Melanie de Visser. © Ethnographic Museum at the University of Zurich.

and European museums, because it's the first cooperation between museums that has led to three exhibitions on two continents and, most importantly, European objects being collected and exhibited in an African museum. Until now, we had African objects being displayed in European museums."³⁷ Visitors to the exhibitions in Uganda showed great interest in the information and items of Alpine milk cultures collected by the Ugandan researchers. This approach can be seen as a contribution to a new "Europology."³⁸

Evaluating Positionality and Authorship

At this point one might rightly ask, if mutuality plays a central role in the project described, why was this analysis, in the form of this article, authored by three European and only one Ugandan team member? On the one hand, the European male academic majority authorship—despite the fact that our project core team consists of male and female, Ugandan and Swiss academics and museum professionals who are equally or even more competent critical thinkers and authors³⁹—is due to unequal working conditions. Being academically employed affords the three authors of the Ethnographic Museum at the University of Zurich with resources that allow them to invest time in the academic writing and publication process. Considering gendered inequalities and global hierarchies within academia, it is of course no coincidence that three white Swiss men and only one Ugandan man are representing the binational, female and male cooperation team. Thus, while the publications about our project are certainly beneficial to the whole project team and its broader aims, credits for these outputs themselves are unevenly, not mutually, distributed, and do not reflect the fact that they are based on insights which have been discussed with all the partners.

On the other hand, one of the most important conclusions we have arrived at is that we have not prioritized collective self-reflection about the cooperation process highly enough. Interrogating the trajectory of this neglect retrospectively, one major cause came to mind. The joint planning of the project was focused on: (1) acquiring third-party funding, (2) organizing and facilitating research activities in Uganda and Switzerland, and (3) curating the four exhibitions. Due to a lack of financial means and a relatively tight activity plan, the project team has been very much absorbed with either fundraising, research, or curation.

The lesson we have learned is that it is crucial to ensure the allocation of substantial and sufficient resources of finances, time, and personnel, as well as sufficiently highly prioritizing collective reflecting on and joint publication about the results, in the planning of such projects. Furthermore, commitment from the heads of all the partnering institutions is needed to ensure that their employees can dedicate the time necessary to this reflection, and can be relieved from their other duties during such workshops. It is vital to



Fig. 7. Discussing mechanized milking during research in Switzerland with a farmer, September 2015. Photo: Thomas Laely. © Ethnographic Museum at the University of Zurich.

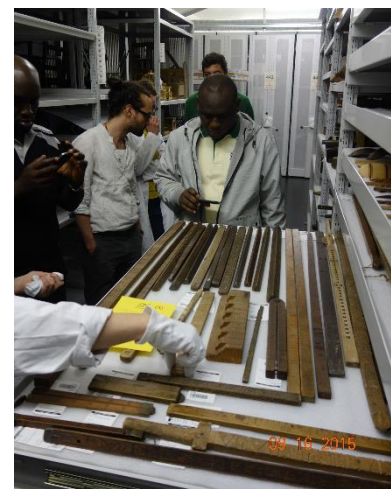


Fig. 8. Team research about the Swiss material culture of milk in the storeroom of the Museum der Kulturen Basel. Photo: Thomas Laely. © Ethnographic Museum at the University of Zurich.

establish a self-reflective and open cooperation culture to eliminate potential obstacles to self-criticism and to ensure a results-open process of reflecting on the cooperation process.

Conclusion

In this article we have analyzed what role mutuality plays in our museum cooperation project, as an ideal and a *modus operandi*. It has become clear that, even though the concept of mutuality was not explicitly and literally expressed, an intrinsic set of cooperation principles that resonate in the concept discussed here were already evident at the beginning of our collaboration. From this analysis of how mutuality is reflected in the cooperation project practices, we can conclude that achieving mutuality is a process of working towards an ideal condition which—once it has gradually been reached (if this is ever fully possible)—is very fragile. In fact, especially in cooperation projects, this is constantly (re-)negotiated and perceived differently. Relationships can be more or less mutual (e.g., in terms of power imbalances regarding specific issues, representation, or benefits for the partners involved).

In a broader sense, we have explored the question of whether and how museum cooperation projects offer the potential for museums to reinvent themselves as institutions of mutuality. We have tried to show that museum cooperation is a field of action for ethnographic museums in which mutuality can be introduced as an ideal and subsequently implemented within cooperation practice. In this sense, a museum of mutuality role model is an institution which responds to the demands of current academic debates by establishing networks and engaging in cooperation.⁴⁰

In the process of cooperating according to the ideal of mutuality, self-critical reflection is crucial to analyze how far mutuality as an ideal and an attribute of a lived working relationship is manifested in the cooperation. Such reflection implies that all partners should examine their roles and agency considering the socioeconomic coordinates of their own positions in relation to the project partners. Acknowledging positionality as the most important domain of analysis and evaluation in North-South cooperation opens up the field for more questions to be raised. Is the newly awakened interest in cooperation by European and North American museums mainly due to the pressures in the public sphere to decolonize museums? How far can and does this lead to neocolonial relations? In other words, are museums in the North just using cooperation projects to merely give themselves the appearance of being decolonized, or are they actually interested in new power relations and true mutuality? Are they imposing their projects, designed with the agenda of decolonizing themselves, on their cooperation partners in former colonies? How far are mindsets and power relations



Fig. 9. Ugandan researchers collecting visual materials of the Alpabzug (transhumant drive from the mountain pasture) in central Switzerland for the exhibitions in Uganda, September 2017. Video still from the exhibition *Points of View*, Ethnographic Museum at the University of Zurich, April 2018 – January 2019. © Ethnographic Museum at the University of Zurich.



Fig. 10. Fieldwork in Western Uganda, April 2017. Photo: Carolina Cerbaro. © Ethnographic Museum at the University of Zurich.

stemming from the colonial past still influencing, maybe unconsciously, current cooperation practice? To tackle such questions, more research and analysis of cooperation projects is necessary.

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Amon Mugume is a Natural Scientist and the Curator of Natural History at Uganda National Museum, Kampala. He is currently the coordinator of the first mobile museum in Uganda, the “Milk Mobile Museum,” as part of the Swiss-Ugandan Museums Cooperation Project.

Raphael Schwere is a social and cultural anthropologist working on human-animal relations, material culture of disability, and museums in the Horn of Africa and East Africa. He is a PhD student and lecturer at the University of Zurich, where he works at the Ethnographic Museum.

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 8. Thomas Laely, Marc Meyer, and Raphael Schwere, "Rethinking Museum Cooperation between Africa and Europe – Do We Need a New Paradigm?," in *Museum Cooperation between Africa and Europe: A New Field for Museum Studies*, eds. Thomas Laely, Marc Meyer, and Raphael Schwere (Bielefeld and Kampala: transcript Verlag and Fountain Publishers, 2018), 3.
 9. For the state of the art in theorizing transcontinental museum cooperation, see Laely, Meyer, and Schwere, "Rethinking Museum Cooperation between Africa and Europe," 4–8.
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 14. George Okello Abungu, "Connected by History, Divided by Reality: Eliminating Suspicion and Promoting Cooperation between African and European Museums," in *Museum Cooperation between Africa and Europe: A New Field for Museum Studies*, eds. Thomas Laely, Marc Meyer, and

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15. Felwine Sarr and Bénédicte Savoy, "The Restitution of African Cultural Heritage: Toward a New Relational Ethics" (Paris, 2018), 28.
16. Larissa Förster (2013), in Thomas Bierschenk, Matthias Krings, and Carola Lentz, "World Anthropology with an Accent: The Discipline in Germany since the 1970s – World Anthropology," *American Anthropologist* 118, no. 2 (June 2016): 366, <https://doi.org/10.1111/aman.12535>.
17. Abungu, "Connected by History, Divided by Reality."
18. For more information on the three museums, visit <https://www.pointsofview.uzh.ch/en/Partnering-Institutions.html>.
19. December 1–3, 2016, organized on behalf of the Swiss Society for African Studies and in cooperation with the Swiss Ethnological Association.
20. For virtual insights into the two exhibitions, see [http://www.musethno.uzh.ch/static/kampala\(1\)/](http://www.musethno.uzh.ch/static/kampala(1)/) and [http://www.musethno.uzh.ch/static/igongo\(1\)/](http://www.musethno.uzh.ch/static/igongo(1)/).
21. For more information, see <https://www.musethno.uzh.ch/en/ausstellungen/Upcoming-Exhibition-Points-of-View.html>.
22. Basu and Modest, *Museums, Heritage and International Development*; Boast, "Neocolonial Collaboration: Museum as Contact Zone Revisited"; Macdonald, *A Companion to Museum Studies*; Andrea Witcomb and Kylie Message, eds., *Museums in Transformation: Dynamics of Democratization and Decolonization*, vol. 1 (Chichester: Wiley-Blackwell, 2015).
23. Leon Anderson, "Analytic Autoethnography," *Journal of Contemporary Ethnography* 35, no. 4 (August 2006): 373–395, <https://doi.org/10.1177/0891241605280449>.
24. The "Mobile Museum," which has taken the milk exhibition to various locations Uganda since the end of February 2019, is being accompanied and documented by another Swiss and a Ugandan filmmaker.
25. Nelson Adebo Abiti, "The Road to Reconciliation: Museum Practice, Community Memorials and Collaborations in Uganda," in *Museum Cooperation between Africa and Europe: A New Field for Museum Studies*, eds. Thomas Laely, Marc Meyer, and Raphael Schwere (Bielefeld and Kampala: transcript Verlag and Fountain Publishers, 2018), 83–95.
26. Sanjek, *Mutuality–Anthropology's Changing Terms of Engagement*, 1–2.
27. Ethnographic Museum at the University of Zurich, *Points of View: Visions of a Museum Partnership* (exhibition), 2018, <https://www.musethno.uzh.ch>.
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29. Marc Meyer and Birthe Pater, "Laboratory 'Museological Exchange Uganda – Switzerland.' September 14th–19th 2015. Final Report" (2015), 6.
30. Ibid.
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32. Ethnographic Museum at the University of Zurich, *Points of View: Visions of a Museum Partnership*.
33. Ibid.
34. Jacqueline Grigo, "Points of View: Kritische Reflexion Einer Transnationalen Museumskooperation," in *Zusammenarbeit(En). Praktiken Der Koordination, Kooperation Und Repräsentation in Kollaborativen Prozessen*, eds. Stefan Groth and Christian Ritter (Bielefeld: Transcript, forthcoming), 79–109.
35. cf. Claude Alvares, "Recapturing Worlds: The Original Multiversity Proposal," 2001, http://lal.bol.ucla.edu/multiversity/Right_menu_items/Claude_proposal.htm; Rosabelle Boswell, "Introduction: Continuities and Contractions in Postcolonial African Anthropologies," in *Postcolonial African Anthropologies*, eds. Rosabelle Boswell and Francis B Nyamnjoh (Cape Town: HSRC Press, 2016), 1–12.
36. See Andrea Witcomb, "Toward a Pedagogy of Feeling: Understanding How Museums Create a Space for Cross-

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- Cultural Encounters," in *The International Handbooks of Museum Studies: Museum Theory*, eds. Andrea Witcomb and Kylie Message, vol. 1 (Chichester: Wiley-Blackwell, 2015), 321–344; Kylie Message, "Contentious Politics and Museums as Contact Zones," in *The International Handbooks of Museum Studies: Museum Theory*, eds. Andrea Witcomb and Kylie Message, vol. 1 (Chichester: Wiley-Blackwell, 2015), 253–281; Boast, "Neocolonial Collaboration: Museum as Contact Zone Revisited."
37. Opening speech at the exhibition "The Power of Milk," Igongo Cultural Centre, September 30, 2017.
 38. See also, Alvares, "Recapturing Worlds: The Original Multiversity Proposal."
 39. The co-researchers and co-curators of the exhibitions in Zurich, Kampala, and Mbarara are Nelson Abiti, Samuel Bachmann, Daniela Bollinger (filmmaker), Melanie de Visser, Jacqueline Grigo, Moses Kashure, Rose Nkale Mwanja, Birthe Pater, Michelle Schuhmacher (filmmaker), and James Tumusiime.
 40. See, for example, Annie Coombes and Ruth B. Phillips, "Museums in Transformation: Dynamics of Democratization and Decolonization," in *The International Handbooks of Museum Studies: Museum Theory*, eds. Andrea Witcomb and Kylie Message, vol. 1 (Chichester: Wiley-Blackwell, 2015), xxxiii–lxiii; Anne-Marie Bouttiaux, "Still Tangled in Contradictions After All These Years: 'Ethnography Museums and World Cultures' European Project," in *Beyond Modernity: Do Ethnography Museums Need Ethnography?*, eds. Sandra Ferracuti, Elisabetta Frasca, and Vito Lattanzi (Rome: Espera Libreria Archeologica, 2013); Witcomb, "Toward a Pedagogy of Feeling."

